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Dear and Reverend Fathers,

Greetings from Bishop's House, Thuckalay! I am sure you had a meaningful celebration of Christmas in your respective settings. We have just entered the new year. Let me greet you, dear Fathers, a grace-filled New Year. May you experience God's choicest blessings throughout this year 2018!

The Syro-Malabar Church keeps the Mission Week from 6 January 2018 to 12 January 2018. You have already read the Circular that our Major Archbishop wrote for the occasion and I am sure you have read it to the people on 31 December 2017 in all our Churches. St John Paul in one of his catechesis given on 19 April 1995 speaks about evangelization and I want to reflect on this topic, as we are about to mark the Mission Week.

The Pope says that the command of Christ to preach Gospel to the ends of the earth, makes the Church catholic and gives her the missionary nature. This is reiterated in the Decree *Ad Gentes* of Vatican II. According to it, "The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father" (AG 2). It is a mystery established by the divine Trinitarian plan which is fulfilled in the Church and made manifest as permanently her own, since the day of Pentecost.

For the Pope, being essentially missionary does not mean merely that the Church has a universal mission to all humanity. Instead, it means that in her constitutive reality, in her soul, and thus it could be said in her very psychology, she possesses a dynamism that concretely unfolds in preaching the Gospel, in spreading the faith and in calling to conversion. This interior drive, intimately linked to her mission, comes from the Holy Spirit and is therefore part of her mystery. The dynamism that comes from it is thus expressed as a distinctive characteristic of the whole Church. This is shown in a concrete and effective way especially in those who, starting with the apostles, go to regions far from their land for the sake of the Gospel.

The Pope acknowledges the fact that all the members within the Church are not called upon to go to the mission lands. Even if all are not called personally to go to the mission lands, each one in the Church and with the Church has the task of spreading the light of the Gospel, according to the saving mission passed on by the Redeemer to the ecclesial community. Indeed, all are called to cooperate in this mission.

In the last decades, Syro-Malabar Church has recognized this truth and has been sending missionaries to different parts of the world. The missionary Eparchies, beginning with Chanda established on 31 March 1962, have played great role in spreading the message of Jesus Christ. Our Eparchy too was originally begun as a mission territory of the Archdiocese of Changanassery. Last year, Pope Francis extended the territory of our Eparchy asking us to spread the message of Christ that we have received from the missionaries to the wider population within the State of Tamilnadu.

Hence, it is our duty to encourage our people to become part of this mission of the Church. The missionary week that we are going to celebrate from 6 January 2018 to 12 January 2018 should become a launching pad for our missionary activities in the newly added territories. I invite all of you, dear Fathers, to encourage our people to become part of this venture by contributing their mite in ways that are possible to them so that we can be faithful to our mission.

NEWS AND EVENTS

Pre-Christmas Celebrations: The Pre-Christmas celebrations were organized for various groups and organizations in the Eparchy: for Priests of our Diocese, for the leaders of Diocesan Institutions, for Bishop's House staff and for animators of various Pious Associations. The Pre-Christmas celebration for Priests was held on 19 December 2017 and the junior Priests of 2016 batch organised it. I appreciate the organizers for making all the Priests happy and giving a foretaste of joyful Christmas through the various entertainment programmes.

This year, we invited neighbours of Bishop's House for a Christmas celebration on 23 December 2017. 17 families accepted our invitation with delight and participated with great enthusiasm. The programme started at 6.00 pm and ended with supper. I express my gratitude to Mr Edwinson, Sr Reeja CMC and Sr Emily CMC for taking the initiative to invite the families and for organizing the programme. I thank each and everyone in the Bishop's House for making it a grand success.

Sinai Theological Institute: As it was announced during the last Priests' Conference, the Eparchial Sinai Theological Institute was established in the Eparchy, even though it is not yet officially inaugurated. Dear Fathers, I request you to encourage our people to attend the theological courses that the Institute offers. The faculty members will conduct awareness classes for all the interested candidates Forane-wise and will explain to them the formalities regarding the entire study programme. I request all the Fathers to select suitable candidates who show interest in deepening their faith by learning Christian doctrines in depth. You can contact Rev. Fr. Christudas, Director of the Institute, for further information.

Visit to Madurai Mission: Along with Rev. Fr Jose Muttathupadam and Rev. Fr Thomas Sathianesan, I visited the Madurai Mission. I celebrated Holy Qurbana for the people who normally come together in the Formation House of CMI Fathers to receive the Sacraments. There are nearly 35 registered families in this Mission. The faithful welcomed us wholeheartedly and soon after the mass we had a meeting in which we welcomed the Madurai community to the Eparchy of Thuckalay and thanked Rev. Fr Nimish Chundankuzhiyil CMI and the CMI community of Coimbatore province for taking care of Syro-Malabar faithful since 2008. Rev. Fr Nimish CMI is an enthusiastic priest who dedicates his valuable time for the pastoral care for faithful there. He welcomed us and offered us hospitality. We have decided to officially name the Centre as *St Chavara Syro-Malabar Mission Church* and to appoint Rev. Fr Nimish Chundankuzhiyil CMI as its priest in-charge. It will function as a full-fledged parish. We plan to inaugurate this new mission on 15 April 2018.

Blessing of New Block at Vattakottai: The newly constructed building that Rev. Sr Mary Mathew Kodiyan built at Vattakottai was blessed on 28 December 2017 at 3.00 pm. There was also Holy Qurbana. The building has two Floors: the ground floor will be used as a Health Care Centre and the first floor will be used as a chapel for the small Christian community there. Rev. Fr Thomas Thuckalay is in-charge of this mission and he is providing pastoral care. I congratulate and thank Rev. Sr Mary Mathew Kodiyan for making efforts to build this Health Centre and to allot a floor for the church services.

Blessing of Pilankalai Church: The newly built church at Pilankalai was blessed on 29 December 2017. I congratulate and thank Rev. Fr Luka Kollampampil CMI and Rev. Fr Thomas Pokavarayathu CMI for their hard work and dedication in building this beautiful church. I congratulate all the faithful who cooperated and worked hard with the Fathers.

Christmas Gathering At Shenkottai Mission: On 21 December 2016 all the Priests and Sisters working in Shenkottai Mission gathered at Pulari School for the celebration of Christmas. The celebration began 6.00pm with an adoration service. During this time, those who wanted to make their confessions, priests were available. After spending an hour in the company of the Lord, a family gathering was held. Rev. Fr Jipson Chully MCBS and Rev. Fr Lijo Thekkel organised the pre-Christmas programme. The climax of the programme was revealing of Christmas friends in order to exchange gifts. The programme ended at 9.30pm. I thank Rev. Fr John Paul, Mission Coordinator, for arranging the programme. I sincerely thank all the Fathers and Sisters who made the day very enjoy full.

Christmas Gathering With Major Seminarians: Christmas gathering with Major Seminarians was organized on 23 December 2017. The Brothers arrived at Sangamam on the evening of 22 December. Rev. Fr Joshy Kulathumkal, Rector in charge of the Major seminarians, met the Brothers personally and engaged them in a sharing session. On the next day, at 11.00 am we had the gathering in which all the Brothers were given Christmas gifts. Christmas cake was cut and shared. The meeting ended with lunch. I am grateful to Rev. Fr Joshy for organising this meaningful programme for our Major seminarians. The Brothers were assigned to various Parishes during their Christmas holidays.

Bible Fest: Forane level Bible Fest competitions for Catechism children were held from 26-31 December 2017. Thuckalay-Plankalai Forane on 26 December at Kattathurai, Padanthalumoodu Forane had on 27 December, Manjalumoodu Forane on 28 December at Mukkootukal, Arukani Forane on 29 December, Soosapuram Forane and Nithravilai Forane had on 30 December. Under the leadership of Rev. Fr Alex Puthettu, Director of Catechism Department, all the Forane Catechism Directors planned painstakingly to organise the competitions. Presence of many Fathers gave great enthusiasm and happiness to the participants. Thank you dear Fathers.

Silver Jubilee of Karunai Illam: Karunai Illam, a unit of KKSSS, was begun in 1992 with the aim of looking after the physically challenged children. It has now turned out to be a home and school for the mentally challenged children. The Institution has completed 25 years of service. The solemn inauguration of the silver jubilee was held on 10 December 2016 at Nithravilai Parish Auditorium. The conclusion of the Jubilee celebration will be held on 20 January 2018. As a Jubilee memorial, we plan to construct a new stage and play ground at Karunai Illam. We wish Rev. Fr Sanil and all the ASMI Sisters all the best for the celebration.

Visit to TNBC Bishops: After the territories of both Ramanathapuram and Thuckalay Eparchies were extended, both the Bishops decided to pay courtesy visits to all the Latin Bishops of the extended territory. From 11-13 December 2017, we visited the Bishops of Salem, Trichy, Thanjavur, Dindugal, Madurai, Sivagangai, Thoothukudi and Palayamkottai. The purpose of the visit was to share with them the new provision and requested their prayers and cooperation in our new mission. All the Bishops welcomed us wholeheartedly and promised their collaboration. We are grateful to all of them.

TRANSFERS AND APPOINTMENTS

- **Rev. Fr Toji Parambilparambil** is appointed as the Parish Priest of St George Mission Anayadi and he takes charge on 6 January 2018.
- **Rev. Fr Mathew Kuzhinjalil** is relieved from the office of Parish Priest of St. George Mission Anayadi.

INFORMATION

- ❖ **Christmas Collection:** Kindly submit the offerings that the people made during the Christmas Qurbana to Rev. Fr Dency Mundunadackal, Procurator of the Eparchy, at the earliest, so that they can be despatched to TNBC for the welfare of the people who are suffering due to Ocki Cyclone. I thank each and every member of our Eparchy for his or her support and help for this special collection.
- ❖ **Diocesan Bible Convention:** The next Diocesan Annual Bible Convention will be on **10 and 11 February 2018**. This will help our people to prepare for the great Lent.
- ❖ Rev. Fr Jose Vayalil will be visiting Australia from 10 January 2018 for a week to baptize his cousin and to bless his aunt's newly built house. We wish him happy journey.
- ❖ The 4th death anniversary Qurbana for Late Fr Thomas Thekkeyil was held at Mankulam on 14 December 2017. Rev. Fr Jose Muttathupadam and few other Fathers from the Eparchy participated in the mass.

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

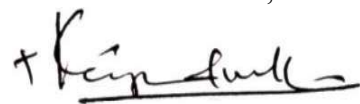
- 01 January 2018 - Priestly Ordination of Dn Anto Prabin CMI at Little Flower Church, Pilankalai
- 06 January 2018 - Blessing of St Alphonsa Women Hostel at Soosaipuram
- 07 January 2018 - Inauguration of Samshabad Diocese
- 08-13 January 2018 - Synod at Kakkanad
- 14 January 2018 - Mass at Nattalam
- 20 January 2018 - Jubilee of Karunai Illam
- 27 January 2018 - Jubilee of Santhi Nilayam Paruthivilai

CONCLUSION

We are approaching the celebration of the Denha, which marks the manifestation of Jesus to the world. The celebration also coincides the beginning of the Syro-Malabar Mission week. I am sure the Mission League will celebrate this week in meaningful ways so that our young people are enthused and motivated to love the missionary work of the Church. The collection that will be taken during those days will be sent to Kakkanad for the upkeep of the Syro-Malabar Missions all over the world. I request you, dear Fathers, to encourage our children to get involved in this important aspect of our Church.

With my prayers and blessings,

Yours in Christ Jesus,



+ **George Rajendran SDB**
Bishop of Thuckalay

