



Bishop's *Circular*

For Priests / Sisters

Bishop George Rajendran sdb

Diocese of Thuckalay

Bishop's House, P B No: 12, Thuckalay PO,
Kanya kumari Dt- 629 175, Tamil Nadu, India

Ref. No. Priests/GR/111/2020

31 July 2020

Dear and Rev. Fathers,

Greetings and prayerful wishes Bishop's House, Thuckalay!

Although we have entered the month of August, the lock down, imposed as result of coronavirus pandemic, continues and we are not able to open our Churches as the virus is spreading at an unprecedented speed. As you are aware, at present there are 2,39,978 confirmed cases, 1,78,178 recovered and 3,838 deaths in our State of Tamil Nadu alone. The district of Kanyakumari is affected quite badly. We have 4,275 confirmed cases, 2,299 recovered and 33 deaths. Looking at the rapid spread of the virus in our region, it is quite clear that we are in for difficult time for the coming days. As I had written to you many times earlier, let this be an occasion for us to come closer to Christ by intensifying our personal prayer, moments of meditation and reading of sacred Scriptures. "For he will deliver you from the snare of the bowler and from the deadly pestilence; he will cover you with his pinions and under his wings you will find refuge" (Ps 91:3-4). Let us serve the people in our parishes through our intercessory prayers. In this circular letter, I want to focus on the various aspects of the presbyterium of our Eparchy. This is also a good preparation for us to celebrate the feast of St John Mary Vianney, the patron saint of all priests.

There is a comprehensive understanding of the *Presbyterium* in the New Testament as well as in the Patristic Age. The council of elders or *presbyteroi* is mentioned frequently in the New Testament. In the Patristic Age, we find much references to the council of presbyters as associated with the Bishop, particularly in the writings of Ignatius of Antioch. Further, with the rise of the mendicant orders in the 12th century, groups of priests and even laymen gathered together aware of their apostolic mission, though independent from local Bishops, yet associated with the College of Bishops through the Pope. Indeed, these associations arose as a prophetic criticism of the clergy, bishops and priests, for their failure to care for the welfare of the poor. After much controversy these groups were institutionalized by the Church as independent but continuing voice in the Magisterium. In the Council of Constance along with the Bishops, delegates of the priests were also voting members. The Assembly of the French Church, prior to the Revolution, was composed of bishops and priest representatives, which dealt with the Church matters. In many of these instances, controversy arose whether such associations would fracture the unity of the Church. Yet each time the Church was strengthened by opening channels for the representative voice of its priests. Our present day priest associations like diocesan senates, priest councils, and even National Federations, are within the ambit of Christian tradition. They are modern examples of this *Presbyterium*. The forms may change yet the reality continues. There are some who fear disunity and dissension, but the Church can only be strengthened when the body of its priests, moved by the Spirit, and acting in concerted efforts, take a more active role in its life.

This was echoed in Vatican II. The Council Fathers gave evidence of a universal *Presbyterium*, a communion of all priests based on their common sharing in the Priesthood of Christ. This Presbyterate reaches beyond all boundaries and unites all as a body of co-operators with the Bishops. In each diocese, this universal sacramental brotherhood finds its expression in the local *presbyterium*.

In our Eparchy too, we have an active and happy presbyterium of priests. Though we do not have the meeting of the presbyterium these days, we keep the warmth of our bonding in our attempt to imitate Christ, our Master and Good Shepherd. Let us never forget the ever green expression *unum presbyterium*. *Presbyteri...unum presbyterium cum suo Eiscopo constituent*- Priests constitute one presbyterate with their Bishop - (LG 28). Presbyterium creates a sense of collective responsibility. Together we form an *ORDO*- the order and discipline of priesthood. The communion of souls cannot be restrained by the quarantine of bodies. Though we are physically dispersed our intentions and actions converged into a presbyterium in spirit.

As a presbyterium, we grow each and every day in our priestly fraternity. Pope Francis in his address to the Global Conference of Human Fraternity in Abu Dhabi said: "Today, we too in the name of God, in order to safeguard peace, need to enter together as one family into an ark which can sail the stormy seas of the world: the ark of fraternity."

The verse from the Acts of the Apostles, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (2:42), has special significance now. We should keep our fellowship livelier than before. I am happy to see that many of you are meeting together in our Minor Seminary, KKSSS or Alphonsa College to play and to spend time in fraternising. These meetings are in themselves blessings of God and they should create a deep love, appreciation and friendship among one another. Praying *Ramsa* and reciting the Rosary at the end of these gatherings will surely help us to feel the presence of God as mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles. Be always happy. "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own" (Mt 6:34). Worry does not take away the sufferings of tomorrow; instead, it drains out today's happiness and strength. These meetings, in turn, can strengthen our Presbyterium and our Eparchy.

While we enjoy the benefits of the presbyterium, let me also remind you, dear Fathers, of our pastoral responsibilities as priests. We are ordinary people called to an extraordinary ministry. "You give them something to eat" (Mt 14:16b) is the demand of Our Lord. Let us feed our people with the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the Liturgy. We need to lead them with our own lives of holiness, simplicity and innocence. Though the lockdown is extended even to the month of August, let us have same spirit and fervour with which we had began the lockdown in the month of March. Let us continue to serve the people spiritually through our regular phone calls and online interactions. Let us continue to feed the people with the Word of God in the form of quizzes, stories, etc. Let us not grow tired of doing what is good (Gal 6:9). According to Cardinal Basil Hume, as priests our task is to portray and to expound the Word of God. Our proclamation has to be lively. It is communicated to others in proportion to the way we have made it our own. The Word of God should not be merely heard from our lips, but also seen from our own personal experience of God. Many people are lame and blind because we fail to feed them properly and lead them in a simple way. "I have no one to put me into the pool" (Jn 5:7). We have to lead our people to the pool of the Word of God and to the Liturgy.

In the month of August, we shall celebrate the feast of St John Maria Vianney and the solemnity of the Assumption of Our Blessed Mother. These two events have much to do with our priesthood. Kindly spend as much time as possible in reading the Holy Bible and in adoring the Blessed Sacrament. Let us

offer our prayers and penances for the wellbeing of the people all over the world. We need to take seriously the words of Pope Francis: “We want to respond to the virus pandemic with the universality of prayer, compassion and tenderness. Let us be united.”

I use this opportunity to remind you about the importance of attending the presbyterium meetings and taking part in the forthcoming annual retreat, which will be held from 4-9 October 2020. When we attend the spiritual retreat as a presbyterium, we lift our hearts to God as an Eparchy. I request to you to prepare well for the retreat.

Let us be united in love. We are like a multi-coloured beautiful garment. Each one of us has his own unique place in the presbyterium. Let there be no voice of discord among us. Let us be strongly bonded and spiritually empowered. “Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit and serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer” (Rom 12:9-12).

Our love for the Church and the Eparchy will help us to create a happy presbyterium. Let us love all the institutions in the Eparchy and consider them as our own. I am praying for you during these days of tribulations and financial crises. I thank each one of you for your hard work, co-operation and loving care towards me and towards our Eparchy. I am in touch with the DC and other Dioceses in order to find out when we can resume liturgical services in our Churches.

NEWS AND EVENTS

Meeting of Presbyteral Council and Forane Vicars: An emergency meeting was held on 2 July 2020 with the members of the Presbyteral Council and Forane Vicars to discuss the situation of the parishes and the new directive of the Government of Tamil Nadu regarding the re-opening the places of worship. The Forane Vicars and Presbyteral Council members shared the situation of people and the effects of the spread of Covid-19 in the region. After discussing about the opening of our Churches, taking into consideration the opinions of many priests, it was decided that we shall not open our Churches for the public in the month of July 2020. At the same time, the members of families within a parish will be allowed to attend the Holy Qurbana on request for special occasions. All the priests were asked to follow the rule: Safe Home and Stay Safe. It was also recommended to the Fathers, especially those who are staying alone in the Parishes, after informing the Proto-syncellus, they can stay together with their friends in any of the Parishes or in Institutions like Sangamam, Minor Seminary or KKSSS during the month of July. For the allowance of the priests, it was suggested that those who find difficult to take allowances from the parishes could ask the Eparchial Procurator for financial assistance. I thank all the Fathers who participated in the meeting and shared their opinions.

Dukhrana Feast: The Syro-Malabar Church celebrated the feast of St Thomas, *Dukhrana* on 3 July. Though the Feast was not celebrated solemnly with the parishioners, the day was observed in a most solemn way. Holy Qurbanas were offered in the parish churches without the participation of the faithful. The Circular of Major Archbishop was published in the web media for the faithful of the Eparchy. Bishop’s Holy Qurbana was telecasted by the Matha TV and Shalom TV. All the parish priests encouraged the faithful to attend the mass on television.

Meeting of leaders of United Christian Association: Bishops of four Catholic dioceses and the heads of the non-Catholic Christian denominations of Kanyakumari district met on 4 July 2020 to discuss about the situation arising from the present lock down in the district. 13 leaders were present for the meeting.

The following topics came up for discussion: 1. Reopening of Churches: seeing the fast spreading of Coronavirus in the district the leaders felt that time was not opportune to reopen the Churches formally and decided to extend full support and cooperation to the district collector in this regard. 2. Education scenario in the State: Due to lockdown, no educational institutions are functioning and the administration is unable to pay the staff their salaries. The meeting decided that various Churches join hands with State Level Matriculation School Association and send a memorandum to the Government in this regard. 3. Charity: All the Churches are doing whatever they could to look after the material needs of the people. The leaders encouraged the people to be vigilant and requested the pastors to be with the faithful in these difficult circumstances.

Webinar for the Professors of St Alphonsa College: Computer Science Department of St Alphonsa Arts and Science College, Soosaipuram in co-operation with St Antony's College, Shillong organized an international webinar on 'Different Cloud Platforms' for the professors of these two institutions through Google-meet on 4 July 2020. Mr Aju, Technical Project Manager of Cognizant Technical Solution, USA, was the resource person. I inaugurated the webinar through Google Meet.

Further, the Diocesan Education Commission has decided to organize Teachers' Orientation Programme on Educational Foundations and Trends. It will be conducted on every Fridays from 31 July to 18 September 2020 from 3.00pm to 4.30pm. Many renowned speakers are invited to address the teachers. All the teachers who work in the educational institutions of our Eparchy are expected to attend. I congratulate and thank Fr Thomas Pawathuparampil, Manager, Fr Antony Jose, Correspondent and Mr Isaias, Principal of our College, for their initiative. The programme is going to be very interesting and thought-provoking. I recommend that all the Fathers to attend it online on every Friday. We shall send the link in our WhatsApp group.

New Priests Day: Since we are under lock down due to Covid-19, many of us could not participate in the ordination and give grand welcome to the new priests to our Presbyterium. Hence, our new priests, Fr Sebastian (Shijo) Aikkarakunnel, Fr Robin Jose and Fr Joseph (Toji Sebastian) Kozhuvakandathil were invited for the celebration of Holy Qurbana in St Mary's Chapel at Bishop's House, Thuckalay on 6 July 2020. As representatives, Fathers from Thuck-Pilankalai Forane were invited. After the Holy Qurbana, we felicitated the new priests. I wish the new priests God's blessings and success in their ministries.

Farewell to Fr Joseph Ottalankal MST: Having considered the request of the Superior General of MST Congregation, the Eparchy has relieved Rev. Fr Joseph Ottalankal from his parish ministry. Since it was during the lockdown, he was given a simple farewell by the Eparchy on 13 July 2020. All the Forane Vicars, Fathers from Sangamam and Bishop's House attended the ceremony. The Eparchy is very grateful to Fr Joseph Ottalankal for the 13 years of his pastoral and spiritual ministry in various parishes. He was parish priest of Karode, Arukani, Varuthattu and Annikkarai. I extend my sincere gratitude for his dedicative service.

Day of Prayer for Catechism Children: The catechism classes are being conducted online these days in our Eparchy. Every Sunday the children attend the Holy Qurbana online and then watch the prepared video lessons under the guidance of catechism teachers. There is team working hard to prepare the video lessons. I am grateful to every member of the team. On 13 July 2020, the catechism department organized one-hour of spiritual programme for the catechism children online. It focused on their faith formation. During the programme, Fr Sebastian Puthenpurayil conducted an hour of Eucharistic Adoration for the students studying in classes 4 to 12 while the CMC Sisters organised a prayer session for the children studying in classes 1 to 3. I congratulate Fr Mijo and CMC Sisters for these animations and for the efforts

that they took for the spiritual growth of the children. I specially congratulate Fr Prince Maliyil, Director Catechism, for his initiative and hard work. I also acknowledge the support that Fr Robins Kuzhikodil and his team for preparing the online classes.

Blessing of Hall and Grotto of Vincent De Paul Society Centre: The Vincent De Paul Society has constructed a conference hall and a Grotto in the campus of Ozanam Centre at Utharamcode. I blessed the building and Grotto on 11 July 2020. Rev. Fr Thomas Powathuparampil, VG, Rev. Fr Jose Muttathupadam, Rev. Fr Augustin Thalodil, Rev. Fr Jose Vayalil, Rev. Fr Robin Jose and some representatives of Vincent De Paul Society were present. I congratulate all the members of the Vincent De Paul. A felicitation ceremony was organised after the blessing to thank the outgoing Vincent De Paul President **Mr Ayyathurai** and the office bearers. I am grateful to the team for serving selflessly for the last five years with great commitment to the poor and to the Church.

Minor Seminary Visit: As you know our last year regents and the students of degree courses are staying at St Mary's Minor Seminary, Mukkoottukal and doing their Tamil Classes. On 11 July 2020, they had a day of recollection. During that occasion, I visited the Minor Seminary and celebrated holy Qurbana for brothers and met all of them personally. The newly appointed Eparchial Mission Procure, Rev. Fr Robin Jose, was introduced to them. Sadly, this year we will not have first year brothers in the Seminary as we were unable to recruit vocations and to organise camps.

Feast of St Alphonsa at Nagercoil: We celebrate every year the feast of St Alphonsa very solemnly in the Shrine at Nagercoil as well as in our parishes. This year due to lockdown, we celebrated the feast in a moderate way respecting the Covid-19 protocols. We began the novena in honour of St Alphonsa on 19 July and ended on 28 July 2020. On 26 July we hoisted the flag for the celebrations and ended the three-day festivities on 28 July. Rev. Fr Thomas Powathuparampil hosted the flag and celebrated Qurbana on 26 July. Fr Jose Muttathupadam celebrated Holy Qurbana on 27 July. I celebrated the Holy Qurbana on 28 July 2020 and concluded the celebrations. I congratulate Fr Sanil Panthichirayil and Fr Ajin Jose for organising well all the Masses keeping in mind the restrictions. I thank you, dear Fathers, for conducting novenas in your respective parish churches.

HSSLC Results: All the Schools that the Eparchy of Thuckalay and the Religious Institutions run performed well in the HSSLC examinations. I appreciate the dedication and hard work of all our priests and religious. I congratulate the toppers and all the students who cleared the examinations. I thank all the teachers for preparing the students well. I give below the performance of our schools.

No	Name of the School	Appeared	Passed	I Topper	II Topper	III Topper
1	Alphonsa MHSS Nagercoil	222	222	571	561	553
2	Sacred Heart MHSS Padnthal	98	98	561	538	523
3	APJM MHSS Soosaipuram	78	78	50	520	518
4	Jaya Matha MHSS Christurajapuram	48	46	475	462	449
5	Holy Family HSS Mukkuttukal	75	72	487	476	468
6	St Michael's MHSS Kattathurai (FCC)	44	44	549	505	491
7	St Mary's HSS Kaliyal (CMI)	147	143	495	494	492
8	St Joseph's MHSS, Shenkottai (MCBS)	118	118	570	538	535
9	Sacred Heart Convent Kazhuvanthitta	37	37	480	470	469
10	Carmel Matha Kanniyakumari (CMC)	85	84	560	518	508
11	Carmel Jyothi MHSS, Colachel	30	30	512	510	509

INFORMATION

- **Fr Sanil Panthichirackal** has showed symptoms of Covid-19 and was admitted in the Vasantham hospital on 13 July. But by the grace of God, the result showed negative within three days and he was discharged on 18 July 2020. I thank you, dear Fathers, for your constant prayerful support.
- **Feast of St John Maria Vianney:** This year we will not be able to gather as Presbyterium to celebrate the feast of St John Maria Vianney at our Minor seminary due to the present crisis. However, we shall have the Holy Qurbana on 4 August at 5.00 pm in our Minor Seminary. We have invited only the priests of Manjalumoodu Forane join the celebrations. We will miss the traditional volley ball match, fun, cultural gathering and agape. I shall remember you all in a special way on that day during the Holy Qurbana.
- **Re-opening of Minor Seminary:** As you know this year we do not have the first year students in the Minor Seminary. The classes for the remaining 4th year (10 brothers), 3rd year (2 brothers) and 2nd year (one brother) are about to begin. All together this year we have 13 brothers in the Minor Seminary. We shall begin the academic session on 4 August. Brothers from Kerala have already reached the Minor Seminary and are in quarantine. Rev. Fr Alexander, Spiritual Director from Pala, has already joined the staff. Br Sunil will continue his regency in the Minor Seminary. We wish God's blessings upon the staff and the students.
- **Pastoral ministry of FCC Sisters at Thettivilai:** The SDS Sisters have discontinued their pastoral ministry at Thettivilai parish and FCC Sisters from Bengri community will formally begin their pastoral ministry from 4 August 2020. We shall have a brief prayer service to inaugurate their ministry. I am grateful to the SDS Sisters of Manjalumoodu community for the great service that they rendered during the past years at Thettivilai and wish God's blessings and best wishes to FCC Sisters.
- **New President of St Vincent De Paul Society:** Mr Robi from St Xavier's Parish, Varuthattu was elected the new President of St Vincent De Paul Society in our Eparchy. Mr Robi worked as teacher in different schools of the Eparchy. He was the Headmaster of Varuthattu and Valiyavilai Schools. He retired from the work in 2017 while serving as the Headmaster at St James High School, Valiyavilai. He received *Nallasiriyar Viruthu* in 2016 from the State Government. He served the Church as catechism teacher and he was member of different departments of the Eparchy. His family is very God fearing and is very active in the parish church. With much gratitude, I wish him all the best in the new post as the President of St Vincent De Paul Society. May God bless him!
- **Transfers and Appointments:** I have effected some transfers this year. Due to lockdown, the transfers are delayed. I met all the Fathers in person and have given them transfer letters on 25 July 2020. I am humbled by their sense of respect and obedience towards the Bishop and to the Church. Some Fathers will take charge on 1 August while others will take charge on 17 August 2020. I sincerely thank them for their availability. I have attached the transfer list with this circular. Since the atmosphere is not conducive for large farewell gatherings, you may invite the *uravium* leaders for a brief farewell meeting and thank them for their services to the respective parishes. Similarly, kindly make sure that the church and the presbytery are kept clean and made presentable before the new man take charge.
- **RIP:** Rev. Sr Berghmans SH was called to her eternal reward on 8 July 2020 and the funeral was held on 9 July 2020. Sr Berghmans SH was one of the pioneer missionaries of the Eparchy. She has rendered her services in the Minor Seminary for long period of time since its inception. Let us thank her for her dedicated service in the formation of our candidates. Some of them are already priests today. Many priests could not participate in her funeral. Fr Thomas Powathuparampil, Fr

Jose Muttathupadam and a team from the Minor Seminary along with the Rector attended the funeral ceremonies. Let us pray for her eternal welfare. May she rest in peace!

Sister in-law of Fr Robin Koorumullil died on 20 July and the funeral was held on 21 July 2020. We offer our condolences to Fr Robin and to his bereaved brother and his family.

Covid-19 has claimed the life of Mr Sasi on 9 July 2020. He is from St Xavier's Parish, Varuthattu. Mr Sasi was an active member of the parish and was residing in Chennai for a long time. He contracted the Covid-19 Virus. His mortal remains were cremated and the ashes were buried at Varuthattu on 11 July 2020. I extend our deepest condolences to the family and to the parishioners.

Two families of Vellampi parish tested Covid-19 positive. But now the members are cured and have returned to their homes. One family of Cheenivilai parish tested Covid-19 positive. But now the members are cured and have returned to their home. One family of Thuckalay parish tested Covid-19 positive. But now the members are cured and have returned to their home.

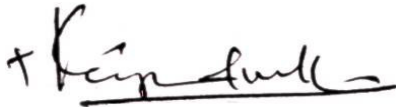
Let us pray that the good Lord may keep our people safe from the virus.

CONCLUSION

We are in the month of August. This month offers us with a number of feasts not only for celebration but also for our edification. Besides the feast of St John Mary Vianney, on 15 August we shall celebrate the twin festivals of Assumption of our Blessed Mother Mary and the Independence of our beloved motherland. Assumption is an expression of our deep faith because we believe in the real, physical elevation of the sinless soul and incorrupt body our Mother Mary to heaven. We shall keep the 15-day fast in preparation for this feast from 1 August to 15 August 2020. 15 August also commemorates the independence that we obtained from the United Kingdom after years of struggle. On this day, let us pray for the wellbeing of our country and ask Mother Mary to intercede for us so that we become free from every form of bondage and be with her one day in heaven.

May our Blessed Mother intercede for each one of us!

Yours in Christ Jesus,



+ **George Rajendran SDB**
Bishop of Thuckalay

