



# 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/96/2019**

30 June 2019

Dear and Reverend Fathers,

Greetings from Bishop's House, Thuckalay!

Many of the saints who adorn the Catholic Church lived their faith in an ordinary way, showing no sign of extraordinary depth of vision or spiritual power. Sanctity is not only associated with extraordinary spiritual power, but also with simple faith lived out with great commitment and generosity. St Alphonsa could not achieve something great during the 36 years of her life, but she has left behind a rich legacy which could help us attain the same heights of sanctity that she could do during her life time. For many of us, who are struggling with difficulties and challenges too heavy to carry, St Alphonsa is a great inspiration.

Born on 19 August 1910, Annakutty, as she was called, was the fourth child of Cherian Ouseph and Mary Muttathupadathu, in Kudamalloor, near Kottayam. She had a poor, difficult childhood and experienced loss and suffering early on in life. Annakutty's mother died when she was young. Her maternal aunt raised her. Her early life was one of suffering at the hands of her stern foster mother and the teasing of school children. Annakutty was educated by her great-uncle, Fr Joseph Muttathupadathu. When Annakutty was three years old, she had eczema and suffered for over a year. Again in 1923, Annakutty's feet were burnt when she fell into a pit of burning chaff; this is considered as a self-inflicted injury in order to avoid her foster mother's attempt to arrange a marriage for her, and thereby to fulfil her desire for becoming a religious Sister instead. This accident left her permanently disabled.

When she became in good health, Annakutty joined the Franciscan Clarist Congregation, a Religious Congregation of the Third Order of St Francis, and through them, completed her schooling. She arrived at the Clarist Convent at Bharananganam, Kottayam district, on Pentecost Sunday of 1927. She received the postulant's veil on 2 August 1928, and in May 1929 she was assigned to teach at Malayalam High School at Vazhappally. Her foster mother died in 1930. Three days later she resumed her studies at Changanacherry, while working as a temporary teacher at a school at Vakakkad.

On 19 May 1930 Annakutty entered the novitiate of the FC Congregation at Bharananganam and received the religious habit, taking the religious name of Alphonsa of the Immaculate Conception. On

11 August 1931, she completed the novitiate and took her first vow. After her final vows, she taught high school students at St Alphonsa Girl's High School, but was often sick and unable to teach. For most of her years as a Clarist Sister she endured serious illness.

In December 1936, it is claimed that she was cured from her ailments through the intervention of the St Kuriakose Elias Chavara but on 14 June 1939 she was struck by a severe attack of pneumonia, which left her weakened. On 18 October 1940, a thief entered her room in the middle of the night. This traumatic event caused her to suffer amnesia and weakened her again. Her health continued to deteriorate over a period of months. She received extreme unction on 29 September 1941. The next day it is believed that she regained her memory, though not complete health. Her health improved over the next few years, until in July 1945 she developed a stomach problem that caused vomiting. Eventually, she succumbed to her illness and died on 28 July 1946.

Reading through her biography, one can notice that God had a special dream for Annakutty. One fine day she had a vision of St Theresa of Lisieux and the seed of religious vocation was sown in her heart. No marriage proposals ever attracted her. Finally, seeing Annakutty's strong resistance to every marriage proposal, her aunt allowed her to join the Clarist convent at Bharananganam, Kerala. Again, she was miraculously cured by Fr. Kuriakose Elias on the ninth day of novena prayed by her and the community. Alphonsa made her solemn profession of her religious vows on 12 August 1936.

Alphonsa had sickness and pain as her companions of life. The bed of thorns and acute pain never discouraged her; instead, it helped her to rejoice in the Lord and to praise him. She realized that suffering is good and valuable for her own growth in holiness and that of the world. She became a little ambassador among her companions and novices. She encouraged them to embrace suffering cheerfully. It is remarkable to know that Alphonsa was familiar with the grain of wheat which has to fall down and decay for raising new sprout and how it has to be ground to be made into hosts which has to be transformed into the Body of Jesus. She often used to remind those around her how the grapes have to be crushed to make wine to become the blood of the Lord.

"The only thing I wish for in this life is to bear suffering for the sake of God's love and to rejoice in it. I am fully convinced that the worldly pleasures are not for me," said Alphonsa. A peep into the letters of St. Paul, great Apostle and ardent Missionary, will take us to the sense and scent of true suffering. In Rom 5:3-5, St Paul expresses very efficaciously how suffering can help to bring forth the best in a person: perseverance, character and hope because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. "For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for us manifesting God's unconditional love for us." Thanks to her intense love for Jesus, Alphonsa knew the worth of suffering. Her constant contemplation on the suffering of Christ and her love for the crucified Lord gradually taught her to experience the Lord's personal love for her and to embrace suffering. What she wrote on 20 November 1944 to her spiritual director testifies to this. "Dear Father, as my good Lord Jesus loves me so very much, I sincerely desire to remain on this sick bed and suffer not only this, but anything else besides, even to the end of the world. I feel now that God has intended my life to be an oblation, a sacrifice of suffering."

During his Apostolic Pilgrimage to India, in his speech at Nehru Stadium, Kottayam on 8 February 1986, Pope St John Paul II spoke how from early in her life, Alphonsa experienced great suffering. "With the passing of the years, the heavenly Father gave her an ever fuller share in the Passion of his beloved Son. We recall how she experienced not only physical pain of great intensity, but also the

spiritual suffering of being misunderstood and misjudged by others. But she constantly accepted all her sufferings with serenity and trust in God, being firmly convinced that they would purify her motives, help her to overcome all selfishness, and unite her more closely with her beloved Divine Spouse.” St Alphonsa matured through suffering. “I had aspired zealously to become a saint. I felt that burning desire after reading the autobiography of St Little Teresa of Lisieux,” affirmed Alphonsa. The death of her dear mother, gradual declining of her own health and all that life offered her did help her to learn to face suffering with dignity and courage.

St. Alphonsa was a great woman of prayer. She developed a personal devotion and love for Christ. This is the fruit of her genuine faith formation. It is also the first visible sign that faith had a live experience in the childhood of Annakutty. In other words, Jesus Christ began to become a concrete personal relational reality for her. It is because of this relational realization of God's love and knowledge of Jesus Christ that Annakutty began to yearn for sanctity. The desire for sanctity was for Alphonsa a concrete response to the invitation of Christ. The surprising depth of spiritual understanding possessed by Alphonsa in her childhood teaches us all the most profound lesson on the Christian life. Spirituality and sanctity are not mere objects to yearn for but come as a result of a personal experience with Jesus Christ in the Church and in the Sacraments.

Pope Benedict XVI has expressed it eloquently in his homily at her canonization. He recalled Saint Alphonsa's life as one of extreme physical and spiritual suffering: “This exceptional woman ... was convinced that her cross was the very means of reaching the heavenly banquet prepared for her by the Father. By accepting the invitation to the wedding feast, and by adorning herself with the garment of God's grace through prayer and penance, she conformed her life to Christ's and now delights in the 'rich fare and choice wines' of the heavenly kingdom. ... (Her) heroic virtues of patience, fortitude and perseverance in the midst of deep suffering remind us that God always provides the strength we need to overcome every trial.”

Saints have amazing ways to reach out to those on earth. While they were alive they had been so much part of this world that now from heaven above their eyes are turned towards us. After the ceremony in St Peter's Square, Rome, Pope Benedict had a message in English for the 5,000 Indians in the crowd of tens of thousands: “As the Christian faithful of India give thanks to God for their first native daughter to be presented for public veneration, I wish to assure them of my prayers during this difficult time.” He added: “I urge the perpetrators of violence to renounce these acts and join with their brothers and sisters to work together in building a civilisation of love.”

As we are preparing to celebrate the feast of St Alphonsa, let us emulate some of the important virtues that she excelled in – her attitude towards suffering and her life of prayer. May St. Alphonsa intercede for each one of us! May she pray for our Church that is going through many trials and difficulties!

## NEWS AND EVENTS

**Graduation Day:** The first batch of teachers of our schools who attended the counselling programme has completed their studies. The graduation ceremony was held on 1 June 2019 at Sinai Retreat Centre. The ceremony coincided with the one-day recollection of all the teachers. I had the privilege of taking part in the ceremony. Twenty-three teachers from the schools of our Eparchy received their certificates. Very Rev. Fr Thomas Powathuparambil, Proto Synchronos of the Eparchy and the newly appointed

correspondent of the schools, Rev. Fr. John Paul, were welcomed during the programme. Rev. Fr. Johnsilal was gratefully remembered for serving the schools as correspondent for the last five years.

**Recollection for all the English and Tamil Medium Teachers:** The Education commission of our Eparchy organized a one-day recollection-cum-animation programme for all the teachers of our English and Tamil Medium schools on 1 June 2019 at Sinai Retreat Centre Kalluvilai. I gave the recollection talk. They also had two orientation classes animated by Rev. Fr George Chinnappa sdb of Trichy Province. More than 600 teachers participated in the recollection. I am grateful to the organisers of the programme.

**Silver Jubilee Celebration of My First Profession:** Under the able guidance of Very Rev. Fr Thomas Powathuparambil, our VG, the Curia Members, Forane Vicars and heads of various departments celebrated the Silver Jubilee of my first religious profession at Aseer auditorium Kalluvilai on 5 June 2019. Though I intended to celebrate my jubilee along with the jubilee celebrations of the Eparchy, you have made the event something special for me. The Jubilee celebrations began with Holy Qurbana. This was followed by a public meeting. Most Rev. Peter Remigius, Bishop Emeritus of Kottar, and Most Rev. Jeromdhas Varuvel sdb, Bishop of Kuzhithurai, were present for the programme. I am grateful to the curia members, all the Fathers, Sisters and faithful for your love, affection and appreciation towards me.

**TCYM Youth Mega Convention:** The much awaited Eparchial level TCYM youth convention was held at Alphonsa College, Karinkal from 7-9 June 2019. It was for the first time that the youth of the Eparchy came together to have a spiritual experience. Rev. Fr Santhosh along with the youth leaders organised this event with meticulous planning. He made every effort to bring the youth of the Eparchy together. A retreat for youth was held at Sinai Retreat Centre to prepare for this mega event. On the concluding day, Mar Joseph Pandarasserry, Auxiliary Bishop of Kottayam, presided over the Holy Qurbana. On the same day at 6.30 pm, there was a public meeting. Most Rev. Nazarene Soosai, Bishop of Kottar, was the chief guest. The youth organised a cultural evening. In spite of the rain, the youth made the evening very memorable. A good number of priests, religious and faithful were present for the Holy Qurbana as well as for the public meeting. I am grateful to Rev. Fr Santhosh Kumar and the youth animators for organising such an event.

**Inauguration of TN Kulam, Kayathar Mission:** TN Kulam, Kayathar Mission station at Thoothukudi district was inaugurated on 12 June 2019. The new mission station is part of the extended territories of our Eparchy. Rev. Sr Ancilin FCC, Provincial took the initiative to begin a convent in Thoothukudi district. It was through the support of Rev. Fr Roy, who is already present in Kayathar, that we were able to get access to this village. Rev. Sr. Lysa FCC and Rev. Sr. Lincy FCC are appointed as the pioneers. The blessing of the new Mission was held in the evening. The TN Kulam village has nearly 100 families. Many of the people were present for the programme. Some Fathers and Sisters from Thuckalay were also present for the function. After the blessing I addressed the villagers and thanked them for appreciating the services of the Sisters and requested them to extend support for the work of the Sisters. All the people were served meal. The Sisters will undertake education ministry, house visits, etc. I appreciate and thank Rev. Fr Roy and Rev. Sr. Ancilin FCC, Provincial, for this great initiative.

**Thirunelveli Mission to Begin Mobile Palliative Care Unit:** Thirunelveli Mission began last year. The first missionaries are Rev. Fr Ginoy and Rev. Fr Alex. They have already formed a Syro-Malabar

migrant community. In order to help the ailing and bed ridden patients in and around Thirunelveli, we have decided to start a mobile palliative care unit. The SABS Sisters of Thuckalay region came forward to help in this mission. Mr. Robin Edathua's house is rented for the Sisters to form a community. The first SABS missionaries are Rev. Sr. Tessy SABS, Rev. Sr Vineetha SABS, and Rev. Sr. Liz SABS. Among them, two are nurses. I blessed the house and the ambulance on 15 June 2019. Many Fathers and Sisters from Thuckalay and some representatives from Thirunelveli mission were present on the occasion. I am grateful to Rev. Sr. Ansit SABS, Regional Superior, for taking this great initiative. I wish the SABS Sisters God's blessings on their new mission.

**Blessing of Kizhamboor Mission:** The new mission station at Kizhamboor was blessed on 24 June 2019. Mr Jose, brother of Sr. Clairelet CMC, fondly know as Japan Saamy, has 18 acres of land in Kizhamboor, Ambasamudram. He is now old and ailing. He decided to donate the land to the CMC Sisters of Chavara Province, Thuckalay provided they look after him till his death. Rev. Sr. Viji CMC, Provincial, accepted the offer and approached the Eparchy for permission to begin a convent. The construction of the convent and an old age home has already begun. I blessed and inaugurated the mission in the presence of many Sisters, Fathers and some lay people from the nearby villages. Rev. Sr. Libiya CMC, Rev. Sr. Reeja CMC and Rev. Sr. Elseena CMC are the first missionaries of Kizhamboor. I wish the CMC Sisters God's blessings on their new mission.

**Catechism Annual Day:** The Eparchial Catechism annual day celebration was held on 16 June 2019 at Aseer auditorium Kalluvilai at 2.30 pm. Faith formation is an important duty of all priests. During the meeting, we thanked Rev. Fr. Sanil for his services at the Catechism Department for the last one year. We also welcomed whole heartedly Rev. Fr Prince, new Catechism Director. Rev. Sr. Jain Mary SH was given farewell as she leaves the office of catechetical secretary after 15years of meritorious services. The children performed various cultural items. The dignitaries present delivered words of felicitation and appreciated the teachers for the noble mission of teaching catechism and the children for their great eagerness to learn more about their Faith. The priests, religious, catechism teachers and students from all the parishes of the Eparchy took part in the annual day celebrations.

**The Inauguration of New Academic Year at Alphonsa College:** The new academic year 2019-2020 was inaugurated at Alphonsa College of Arts and Sciences, Karinkal on 17 June 2019. I had the privilege of taking part in the ceremony. In my address to the students, I stressed on the need for setting targets and to work systematically to achieve those targets. I also inaugurated the newly built library building, which contains a reading room, a reception, a reference section and an E-library. The commerce research department was also inaugurated on the occasion. I wish all the students and staff of the College God's blessings as they begin their new academic year.

**Rev. Fr. Cyriac Koottumelil, Pioneer Missionary of Kanyakumari Mission, passed away:** Rev. Fr Cyriac, belonging to the Archdiocese of Chenganaserry, passed away on 26 June 2019. He worked in the Kanyakumari mission from 1973 to 1995. He was 80 years old. Soon after his arrival in the missions, Fr Cyriac ventured into social and charitable works. He was able to help the poor and the marginalised people of Kanyakumari district. He was a visionary and a down-to-earth priest. He could identify himself with the poor. He was able to form many Christian communities, which have now become large parishes. The funeral was held on 29 June at Nedumudi parish. Many priests, sisters and faithful attended the funeral.

**Rev. Sr. Sophy Rose SH**, belongs to the Province of Chenganaserry, passed away on 26 June 2019. She was ailing for some time and was receiving treatment from Medical Centre, Kottayam. Sr. Sophy Rose belonged to the first batch of four Sacred Heart Sisters who came to Kanyakumari mission in 1969. She worked 50 years in various communities of the Eparchy despite the many hardships that she had to endure. She has prepared a number of children and adults to receive sacraments. Her funeral was held on 29 June at SH provincial House Pareil, Chenganaserry. I presided over the Funeral Mass and gave the eulogy. Some priests, religious and faithful from Thuckalay attended the funeral. The Eparchy remains indebted to Sr. Sophy and the Sacred Heart Congregation. May the Lord grant her eternal rest!

**Inter-Eparchial Meeting at Kanjirappally:** The Inter-Eparchial meeting was held at Kanjirappally on 25 June 2019. The Bishops of the four Eparchies namely, Archbishop Joseph Perumthottam, Bishop Joseph Kallarangatt, Bishop Jacob Murickan, Bishop Mathew Arackal, Bishop Jose Pulickal, Bishop Pallikkaprambil and Bishop George Rajendran were present for the meeting. All the Vicars General and heads of departments took active part in the meeting. During the first session, the mission in the extended territories of our Eparchy was discussed. Rev. Fr Peter Kizhakeyil and Rev. Fr Thomas Powathuparambil shared the developments in the region. I thanked the three Eparchies for adopting some of the districts to begin missionary works. Bishop Joseph Kallarangatt had the opinion that the Eparchies that have taken up the various districts should help in the building up of infrastructure and supply sufficient priests to look after their respective missions. The meeting came to an end at 1.00 pm.

### INFORMATION

- ❖ **Rev. Fr. Jinu Jacob** left for Rome, Italy on 26 June 2019 to begin his doctoral studies. We wish him God's blessings.
- ❖ **Deacon Shijo** will return to the Eparchy on 3 July 2019 after completing his Theology and two years of Licentiate studies in Moral Theology. He will be engaged in diaconate ministry and will prepare for his priestly ordination to be held in December 2019.
- ❖ **The Inauguration of the Golden Jubilee celebrations** of St. Thomas Parish, Marapady will be held on 3 July 2019.
- ❖ **The Requiem Mass** for the repose of the soul of Mr George Mangalamadam, father of Rev. Fr. Jomon Mangalamadam was held on 18 June 2019. Along with some of the Fathers, I attended the ceremony.
- ❖ **A Holy Qurbana was celebrated at Chavara Mission, Kuttaicode** on 20 June 2019. It was the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the mission. Began in the year 2014 by Rev. Fr Jose Muttathupadam, the then VG along with Mr. Mariadas, Mr. Edwinson and Mr. Berlin for the spiritual care of the people of Kuttaikode. Rev. Fr. Thomas Powathuparambil, Vicar General, was the main celebrant. More than 80 people participated in the Holy Qurbana and public meeting.
- ❖ **The inauguration of the Academic Year 2019-2020 at Minor Seminary** was held on 22 June 2019. This year we have nineteen brothers in our minor seminary. Four of them are going for their missionary orientation course at Ujjain. There are six first year students. Of these, four are from Kerala while two are from the Eparchy of Thuckalay. I wish Rev. Fr Joshy and his team of formators God's blessings as they form our future priests.
- ❖ **Inter-Departmental Meeting** was held at Bishop's House on 27 June 2019. The Directors and Assistant Directors of various departments and pious associations were present. During the meeting we welcomed the newly appointed Directors and explained to them about the importance of such meetings and the responsibilities that are entrusted to them.

- ❖ **Blessing of Cumbam Mission** will be held on 2 August 2019. The Eparchy of Kanjirapally will look after the mission. The FCC Sisters of Idukki province will also begin their activities there.
- ❖ **Feast of St. Alphonsa at Nagercoil** will begin on 19 July 2019 with the hoisting of the flag. As in previous years, I request all the Fathers to participate in the celebrations and to urge our people to take part in them. Kindly encourage the people to make pilgrimages to the shrine at least once during the ten-day celebrations. The youth of our Eparchy normally play a major role in the celebrations. This year too the youth will take the lead in organising the *Nadai payanam*, which will be held 20 on July 2019. The various events will be intimated to you on 9 July during the priests' conference. It is very important to prepare our faithful for this pilgrimage through special prayers, fasting and novena. The important highlights are the following:
  - 19 July – *Kodiyettu*, Holy Qurbana, Very Rev. Fr Thomas Powathuparambil, Proto-Syncellus.
  - 20 July – *Nadai payanam* Pilgrimage by the youth and the faithful of the Eparchy
  - 24 July – Malankara Holy Qurbana
  - 27 July – Holy Qurbana in Latin rite presided over by Most Rev. Neethinathan, Bishop of Chengalpettu
  - 28 July – **Eparchial Pilgrimage Day**: Mar George Rajendran sdb, Eparchial Bishop, will preside over the Holy Qurbana. I request all the parishes to participate in the Eparchial Pilgrimage. Kindly arrange the necessary transport for your respective parishioners.

### FORTHCOMING EVENTS

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| 07-09 July 2019 | - TNBC, Coimbatore   |
| 08-09 July 2019 | - Orientation Programme for Junior Priests                                 |
| 09 July 2019    | - Eparchial Priests' Conference  |
| 19 July 2019    | - The Feast of St. Alphonsa begins at the Shrine in Nagercoil              |
| 20 July 2019    | - <i>Nadai Payanam</i> to St. Alphonsa's Shrine, Nagercoil                 |
| 28 July 2019    | - Eparchial level feast day Holy Qurbana at St. Alphonsa Shrine, Nagercoil |

**On 8-9 July 2019 – On-going Formation for Junior Priests at Sangamam:** I request all the junior priests to attend the programme without fail. Rev. Fr. Solomon will be the resource person and Rev. Fr. Thomas Powathuparambil, VG will coordinate the programme.

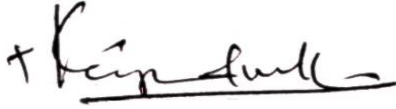
### CONCLUSION

On 3 July, we shall celebrate Dukhrana wherein we remember the founder of our Church, St Thomas the Apostle. He is considered the doubting apostle but he makes the great profession of Faith, "My Lord and My God". St. Thomas confesses Jesus in the very words ("My Lord and my God") used by the Psalmist for Yahweh. Raymond Brown calls this "the supreme Christological pronouncement of the Fourth Gospel." Here, the most outrageous doubter of the resurrection of Jesus utters the greatest confession of belief in the Lord who rose from the dead. This declaration by St. Thomas is very significant for us for two reasons. 1) It is the foundation of our Christian Faith. Our Faith is based on the Divinity of Jesus as proved by his miracles, especially by the supreme miracle of his resurrection from the dead. Thomas' profession of Faith is the strongest evidence we have of the resurrection of

Jesus. 2) Thomas' Faith culminated in his self-surrender to Jesus, his heroic missionary expedition to India in A.D. 52, his fearless preaching, and the powerful testimony given by his martyrdom in A.D. 72. We are the great beneficiaries of his ministry. As we celebrate the feast of St Thomas, let us entrust ourselves to his intercession of St. Thomas that we may be strengthened in our faith in the risen Lord and may give witness to him in whatever form of ministries we are engaged in.

With my prayers and blessings,

Yours in Christ Jesus,



+ **George Rajendran SDB**  
Bishop of Thuckalay

