



Bishop's *Circular*

For Priests / Sisters

Bishop George Rajendran sdb
Diocese of Thuckalay

Bishop's House, P B No: 12, Thuckalay PO,
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Ref. No. Priests/GR/89/2018

31 December 2018

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 entering a new year. Let me greet you, dear Fathers, a grace-filled New Year. May you experience God's choicest blessings throughout the year 2019!

Liturgically, the Syro-Malabar Church keeps the feast of Denha on 6 January and the Mission Week from 6 January to 12 January 2019. Denha is a Syriac word which means dawn or sunrise. Latin Church uses the term Epiphany, originating from Greek and means Appearance. Denha refers to the public manifestation of the Holy Trinity at the Baptism of Jesus, where God the Father testified Jesus as the Son of God and the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove (Cf. Mt 3:17; Mk 1:11; Lk 3:22). Thus the Holy Trinity is revealed to the world, so also Jesus as the Incarnate Son of God.

Denha is the feast of the great revelation of Jesus as the light of the world. Jesus is the real **Sun** that dawned in the world through Incarnation. During the hidden life of Jesus in Nazareth, the public did not recognize Him as the real *Sun* who illuminates the whole of humanity. He was manifested to the public by God the Father at His *Baptism* as we have seen above.

Zachariah, father of John the Baptist, prophesied "...when the day shall *dawn* upon us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Lk.1:76-79). St Ephrem (+373) has written extensively about the coming of the saviour in terms of new dawn or sunrise. According to him Mary's conception was on April 10, and Jesus' birth was on January 6. During this time there had no great difference between the feast of Nativity and the feast of Denha and he wrote a hymn about it, entitled *Hymnon the Nativity*. Narsai wrote a *memra* about the *Denha* of Jesus under the title "*The Hymn of the Denha of the Lord*"

As you are well aware, the members of the Syro-Malabar Church celebrate Denha in two ways – as *Pindiperunnal*, which means banana trunk feast or as *Rakkuliperunal*, which means feast with a night bath.

In northern regions of Kerala like Thrissur, the feast of Denha is popular as *Pindiperunnal*. On the previous night of Denha, a decorated plantain trunk is erected in front of houses with many torches

attached to it. The family members go around it singing a Syriac hymn "El Paiya," which means "God is light." Special dishes are also prepared during this time. Special prayers conducted in the churches.

In southern areas like Pala, this feast is popular as *Rakkuliperunal* – feast with night-bath in river. In imitation of Jesus' Baptism, people used to perform a ritual bath in nearby ponds or rivers singing psalms and other religious hymns on the previous night (ravu) of the feast of Denha.

Similar customs are found in other eastern Churches too. In the Coptic Church Denha was celebrated on the banks of river Nile, in the first millennium. Russian Orthodox Christians too keep similar practices. Priest blesses the water, as symbolic reminder of the purification of all water sources by the baptism of Jesus. At the end of the ceremony, people would jump into the water as a symbolic ritual of purification and a reminder of the baptism of Jesus and their own.

It is important to recognise that both the forms of celebrations refer to the great presence and action of God in Jesus. The season of Denha - Manifestation - also begins with the feast of Denha. And the prayers and readings refer to the public ministry of Jesus. Let us celebrate this feast in a worthy manner with our people.

The Fridays of this period are the commemoration days of the saints who bore witness to the mystery of revelation. These holy Fathers are the cornerstones on which is founded the witnessing value of Christ in this world. In this Friday-memorial, St John the Baptist, Apostles Peter and Paul, the Evangelists, St Stephan the first martyr, the Greek Doctors, the Syrian Doctors, the Patron Saint of the Church and all the Departed are remembered in this order according to the number of the weeks. Thus, the following Friday commemorations perfectly cope with the spirit of the season

Regarding the missionary week or *preshithavaaram*, our beloved Cardinal Mar George Alencherry, Major Archbishop of Syro-Malabar Catholic Church says: "We recognize that the vocation of the Church is to be a missionary and we have to rekindle the embers of our apostolic zeal. We have to continue our prayers for the showering of the gifts of the Holy Spirit on the Church as well as on us." According to him, the youth is the hope of the Church. She wants to appropriate the special talents of the Youth like their imagination and creativity for the missionary apostolate of the Church. This mission week should help to increase missionaries in our Church and to help those missionaries who are working in the missions to do their ministries with full dedication. We celebrate the mission week especially to respect, honour and remember the love of the martyrs who gave their life for their mission.

For St John Paul II, 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. Two years ago, 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. We have already begun our missions in Madurai and Tirunelveli. I am sure in this New Year we will be able to expand our missionary work to other parts of our State.

Hence, it is our duty to encourage our people and mission league children to become part of this mission of the Church. The Syro-Malabar mission week that we are going to celebrate in our diocese is on 5 and 6 January 2019 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

Blessing of Marian Senai Office: Since its inception in our Eparchy, the Marian Senai did not have a proper place for its members to gather and pray. The executive meetings were normally held at Soosaipuram due to lack of a proper office. The Eparchy has now offered the Marian Sena an office-cum-hall in the first floor of the former Chrisma Shop at Padanthalumoodu for organising regular prayers and meetings. This office was blessed on 8 December 2018. In the presence of Rev. Fr Jose Muttathupadam, Spiritual Director, Rev. Fr Thomas Sathianesan, Chancellor, Rev. Fr Antony Jose, Mr Vincent Soairaj, President, Kottar Region, Mr Bengamin Jose, President, Thuckalay Komisium, Mr Eugene, Former President, Kottar Region and Mr Pannerselvam, Vice President, Thuckalay Komisium and representatives of Marian Senai of our Eparchy, I blessed the office. I sincerely thank each and every one and wish them for their presence and wish them God's blessings.

Meeting of *Kaikars* and Accountants: The meeting of the Eparchial *Kaikars* and Accountants was held on 9 December 2018 at Sangamam. 54 participants took part in this meeting. I had the opportunity to meet all of them. During the meeting, it was suggested that the Fathers need to visit the houses on a regular basis. The participants felt that many of our people are being influenced by the Pentecostal movement due to lack of house visits. Dear Fathers, I strongly recommend that you visit our people frequently. I thank Rev. Fr Thomas Sathianesan, Chancellor for having organized the meeting very efficiently.

Regional Youth Meet: Tamilnadu Regional Youth Meet was conducted this year in our Eparchy at Sangamam on 8 and 9 December 2018. The Director of Youth Apostolate of Syro-Malabar Church organised the meeting. Representatives from all the Tamilnadu Syro-Malabar Eparchies participated.

Teachers' Orientation Programme: The Education Commission of the Eparchy organized an orientation programme for teachers who are either doing their B. Ed Course or just completed on 9 December 2018 at Alphonsa Arts and Science College Soosaipuram. The programme began at 2.00 pm. The aim of the programme was to help the participants to bring out their talents and to give them

opportunities for spoken English. Even though there were only 25 participants, similar orientation programmes will be organised on a yearly basis for the benefit of newly inducted teachers. I ask all the parish priests to encourage more teachers to participate in such programmes in order to develop their education skills.

Death Anniversary of Rev. Fr Thomas Thekkeyil: The fifth death anniversary of Rev. Fr. Thomas Thekkeyil was commemorated on 14 December 2018 at Mankulam. Rev. Fr Thomas Sathianesan, Chancellor, Rev. Fr Thankachan SDB, Rev. Fr Sajan Nettarepponghu, Rev. Fr Toji Parambilparambil and Rev. Fr Printo Kurias went to Mankulam and celebrated Holy Qurbana in the parish church. They also prayed the Office for Dead at the tomb of Rev. Fr Thomas Thekkeyil. Let us remember the departed soul of Rev. Fr Thomas Thekkeyil and pray for his eternal life.

UCC Christmas Gathering: The annual Christmas gathering of the United Christian Council of Kanyakumari district was held on 20 December 2018 at Salvation Army Church, Nagercoil. The leaders representing various Christian denominations were present for the occasion. The meeting began at 10.30 am with the opening prayer. Rt Rev. Nazareen Soosai, President of the UCC, chaired the meeting. Mr Raj, Secretary presented the report of the activities that the UCC undertook during the past year. The report was passed. All the leaders from various churches, then, shared Christmas messages. At the end of the meeting there was a press conference in which, the President on behalf of the UCC wished every one for Christmas and New Year 2019. The meeting also reiterated the commitment of the UCC to work for peace and harmony. It also pledged to protect the environment and the natural resources of the district. The meeting ended with a sumptuous meal.

Christmas Celebrations at Madurai and Shenkottai: I visited St Chavara Mission Parish, Madurai on 16 December 2018 and celebrated Holy Qurbana at 8.15am for the people. After the Mass, pre-Christmas celebrations were organized by the community under the leadership of Rev. Fr Aneesh Cheruparampil CMI. Rev. Sr Rosline SABS and Rev. Sr Missy Maria SJSM, who are assisting the Fathers in the pastoral ministry also helped in organising the programme. Through their frequent visits, the Sisters are bringing more people to the Church. The number of the faithful has increased from 35 to 48. I sincerely thank the Sisters as well as Rev. Fr Aneesh Cheruparampil CMI for their hard work. The Sisters also visit the people in the villages in order to scout the possibility of beginning some specific ministries in the area. I request you to keep our Madurai Mission in your prayers.

After visiting the Madurai Mission, I went to Puliyarai, Shenkottai to take part in the pre-Christmas celebrations of priests and sisters. The mission work in Shenkottai is slowly taking shape. More centres are being opened. Recently, we opened the Surandai and Suntharapandiyapuram Missions. More people are joining the Church. I sincerely appreciate all the missionaries of the Shenkottai mission for their dedicated work.

Minor Seminary: The first year brothers had their second term exams from 17 – 21 December 2018. On 22 December at 5.30 pm a pre-Christmas celebration, named *Seed*, was held for the sponsors of the seminarians. Over 35 members participated in the gathering. On the same day, at 7.00 pm, the minor seminarians had their pre-Christmas celebration. Rev. Fathers and Sisters from Manjalumoodu Forane and from other nearby parishes took part in the programme. The seminarians went for their Christmas vacation on 23 December. They will return on 5 January 2019.

Christmas Celebrations: The Eparchy organized a number of Pre-Christmas celebrations. We had Christmas Celebrations with Institutional Staff on 15 December 2018, with the priests on 18 December 2018, with the neighbourhood on 20 December 2018, with the staff of Bishop's House and Sangamam on 21 December 2018, with CRI members, well-wishers and Minor Seminarians on 22 December 2018, with the Major Seminarians and with the Bishop's House Community on 23 December 2018. The celebrations with neighbourhood and with well-wishers were high points of this year's celebrations. Under the leadership of Rev. Fr Anil Raj, Rev. Fr Thankachan sdb, Rev. Fr Sajan Nettarepponghu, Rev. Sr Reeja CMC, Rev. Sr Emily CMC, Mr Edwinson and Brothers invited people residing in the neighbourhood of the Bishop's House and had arranged an eventful evening to celebrate the birth of Jesus. More than 60 people belonging to different religious affiliations attended the programme. I thank everyone for their hard work.

Similarly, the well-wishers' pre-Christmas gathering that the PRO organized on 22 December at Sangamam was another important highlight of this year's Christmas celebrations. This gathering was meant to honour the people who help our Eparchy in our various departments. About sixty people participated in this meeting. Rev. Fr Antony Jose, Mr Soundara Raj and Mr Edwinson ably organised this event. I thank them.

Bible Fest 2018: The Forane level Bible Fest competition for Catechism students was conducted from December 26-31, 2018. All the parishes took part in the competition in their various capacities. It was organised by the Narcheithi Nilayam. The themes for the various competitions were taken from the bible itself. This is to give more familiarity and love for bible. All the children with much preparation and rigorous practice took part in the competitions. I am grateful to the Director, Fr. Sanil Panthichirackal and Assistant Director, Fr. Shoji Puthenpurackal of Catechism department who organised the events in a professional manner. Thanks to all the parish priests and sisters who have trained and prepared the children. Special thanks to priests and curia members for encouraging the children with their physical presence during the competitions. I give below the winners of the competition Forane wise:

Arukani Forane

1 ST	Holy Family Church, Arukani	124 points
2 nd	St. Thomas Church, Pathukani	109 points
3 rd	St. Thomas Church, Netta	86 Points

Manjalumoodu Forane

1 ST	Little Flower Church, Manjalumoodu	100 points
2 nd	St. Thomas Church, Muzhucode	64 points
3 rd	Holy Cross Church, Malaicode	61 Points

Nithiravilai Forane

1 ST	Jayamatha Church, Nithiravilai	113 points
2 nd	St. Antony's Church, Vayalinkarai	104 points
3 rd	St. Xaviers Church, Varuthattu	99 Points

Padathalumoodu Forane

1 ST	St. Thomas Church, Palugal	114 points
2 nd	St. Mathew Church, Annikarai	88 points
3 rd	St. Martin De Pores Church, Kazhuvanthittai	75 Points

Thuckalay – Pilankalai Forane

1 ST	St. Michaels Church, Kattathurai	114 points
2 nd	St. Alphonsa Church, Nagercoil	70 points
3 rd	St. Mary's Church, Thuckalay	60 Points

Soosaipuram Forane

1 ST	St. Joseph Church, Soosaipuram	112 points
2 nd	Christ the King Church, Palapallam	102 points
3 rd	St. James Church, Mankarai	90 Points

INFORMATION

❖ **Thiruvvelvi Mission:** Rev. Fr Ginoy and Rev. Fr Alex organized the silver jubilee of wedding of Mr Maria Robin and Mrs Esther Jayarani in Thirunelveli mission on 15 December 2018. Together with the Curia members and some Fathers and Sisters, I took part in the gathering.

❖ **CMC Vice-Provincial and her Team for Thuckalay Vice-Province:** Provincial Synaxis of Chavara CMC Province of Thuckalay was held from 8– 11 December 2018. It elected the new team to govern the Vice-province.

Vice Provincial Superior	: Rev. Sr Alice Vigi CMC
Assistant Vice Provincial Superior	: Rev. Sr Vinaya CMC
Councillors	: Rev. Sr Zeligurine CMC
	: Rev. Sr Mercina Jose CMC
	: Rev. Sr Soona Rose CMC
Vice Provincial Secretary	: Rev. Sr Christy Maria CMC
Finance Secretary	: Rev. Sr Roselet CMC
Internal Auditor	: Rev. Sr Maria Martin CMC

I wish all God's blessings upon them and pray that the good Lord may bless the new team. I sincerely thank the previous team for their services to the Eparchy.

❖ **New SABS Regional Superior and Team:** The SABS Congregation of Changanassery Province had Synaxis from 8-13 December 2018. A new Provincial team was elected. The new provincial team has appointed the new Tamilnadu Regional Council team.

Regional Superior	: Rev. Sr Ansit SABS
Assistant Regional Superior	: Rev. Sr Alice SABS
Councillors	: Rev. Sr Vimala SABS
	: Rev. Sr Litty SABS
Finance Officer	: Rev. Sr Teresa SABS

I make use this opportunity to thank Rev. Sr Rose Martine SABS and her team for having rendered selfless services in the Eparchy. I thank Rev. Sr. Rose Martine SABS, who worked with great commitment for the welfare of the Congregation for three years. She was very supportive of the various activities of the Eparchy.

❖ **SH Congregation:** The SH Congregation had its Synaxis and Rev. Sr Mercita SH, one of the pioneer missionaries and the former head mistress of Holy Family School Mukkoottukal, was elected as Vice Provincial of Changanassery Province. She will be leaving for Changanassery very soon. I congratulate Rev. Sr Mercita SH and thank her for her long years of selfless and dedicated mission work in the Eparchy.

❖ **Blessing of Foundation Stone at Kalluvilai:** The foundation stone for the new Church at Kalluvilai was blessed on 17 December 2018. The church construction is going on.

- ❖ **Conference Hall:** The interior work for the making of a new conference hall at our minor seminary is under way. We are grateful to Fr. Joshy Kulathumkal, the Rector for taking the initiative.
- ❖ **Flood Relief Fund:** The money we have collected from the Eparchy in order to support the flood-affected people of Kerala, have been handed over to Mar Joseph Perumthottam, the Archbishop of Changanassery on December 28, 2019. It was Rs. 15 lakhs and I am grateful to everyone in the Eparchy for their generosity to help the poor.

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

15 January 2019	- Diocese level Bible Fest completions
07 - 18 January 2019	- Synod, Kakkanadu
21-22 January 2019	- TNBC, Madurai
26 January 2019	- Silver Jubilee of Santhi Nilayam, Paruthivilai
29 January 2019	- Priests' Conference, Sangamam

CONCLUSION

We have just celebrated the birth of Jesus. Let the Christmas wish of our Holy Father Pope Francis ring in our ears as we conclude the celebration of Christmas. “May the little child whom we contemplate today in the manger, in the cold of the night, watch over all the children of the world, and every frail, vulnerable and discarded person...May all of us receive peace and consolation from the birth of the Saviour and, in the knowledge that we are loved by the one heavenly Father, realize anew that we are brothers and sisters and come to live as such!”

With my prayers and blessings,

Yours in Christ Jesus,



+ **George Rajendran SDB**
Bishop of Thuckalay

