



Bishop's *Circular*

For Priests / Sisters

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Diocese of Thuckalay

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Ref. No. Priests/GR/100/2019

31 October 2019

Dear and Rev. Fathers,

Greetings from Bishop's House, Thuckalay!

In this circular, I want to present to you a brief summary of the letter that our Holy Father wrote to all the priests on 4 August 2019, in observance of the one-hundred sixtieth anniversary of the death of Saint John Vianney. In fact, Pope Francis issued an unexpected but affectionate letter to his sons and brother priests throughout the Church.

The letter was another surprise for the pope who, in the words of the prefect of his household, Archbishop Georg Gänswein, "is a person who surprises and welcomes surprises." For a pope most known for constructively criticizing his priests, the letter is a welcomed suspension of previous comments. It comes as blessed relief, a letter of paternal reassurance and fraternal charity.

Pope Francis begins the letter: "As an older brother and a father, I too would like in this letter to thank you in the name of the holy and faithful People of God for all that you do for them, and encourage you..."

After the initial introduction, which provides an outline for the letter, the pope moves into a summary of the pain caused by the current crises, then to words of gratitude, followed by a message of encouragement, and then concludes with praise for the Blessed Mother, who is hailed as an example and model for priests and for the Church.

In the first part of the letter, the pontiff acknowledges the current crises in the Church and the pain they have caused believers and society. He also addresses the suffering of good priests, grieving for the priests whose own faith has been scandalized by the abuse and cover-ups, who are also thrown into an environment of suspicion by people of goodwill, and who have had their own pastoral ministries limited by the questioning and hesitation of others because of the crises.

In these acknowledgments, the pope proves to be a watchful shepherd, since many good priests - along with their people - have been shocked, hurt, and confused by the scandals and cover-ups.

After addressing the pain caused by the scandals, Pope Francis moves to words of gratitude. He affirms the selfless and dedicated service of the vast majority of priests, who seek to reflect the

love and mercy of God to the people entrusted to their care. He gives thanks for their tireless efforts and constant compassion to others.

These words are followed by a message that is self-described as “encouragement,” but which is more of an exhortation and paternal correction. In this section of the letter, Pope Francis again displays his concern for the spiritual health of his priests. While his words ring true, they seem misplaced in the intention of the letter.

At times, it appears as if the pope is expressing a disapproval of the life of hard-working priests. However accurate (or not) these words might be, they appear out of place in the letter, especially following such strong words of gratitude. Perhaps the best explanation that can be given to the exhortatory words is that the pope truly wants humble, poor, and people-oriented priests and, in spite of any context, he has to emphasize these essentials.

Overall, the letter demonstrates much of the heart and spirit of Pope Francis. The recent book, *The Other Francis: Everything They Did Not Tell You About the Pope* by Deborah Castellano Lubov, reveals the inner life and convictions of the pope by way of multiple interviews with people who have known him for years or who have worked with him.

The quote above from Gänswein is taken from the book, as is this quote from the pontiff’s sister: “He was always joyful and supported me, as it is right for an older brother to do.”

In many respects, the book serves as an interior preamble to the writings of Pope Francis. The book intricately guides people (including myself) to understand who the pope is, what makes him tick, and from what personal worldview he is speaking. The book is a valuable resource for understanding the pope’s letter to priests.

After his encouragement, the pontiff’s letter comes to an abrupt conclusion. He moves to praising the Virgin Mary and wraps up the letter. It seems something is missing. Where is repentance? Although very briefly mentioned in the first section on pain, the repentance stated there is removed from personal accountability.

And, truth be told, the letter would have been much stronger and more credible if there had been an apology or some form of repentance by the pope. The pontiff has apologized before, in terms of the affairs in Chile and with the mismanagement and leaks in the Roman Curia, and so it would not have been out of character.

By not having some form of strong and robust repentance, which is central to our Christian faith, the letter is weak and less effective in giving inspiration and authentic encouragement to the countless faithful priests who love, work hard, and have to regularly apologize for the scandals and for the state of the Church today.

During our meeting with Pope Francis during the Ad Limina Visit, he recalled this letter that he wrote to all the priests in the month of August 2019 and then spoke about the four types of relationships that every priest must cultivate in his life. He spoke about the relationship with God, with bishop, with priests and with the people of God.

In order to cultivate closer relationship with God, the Holy Father suggested that the priests must spend more time in prayer and in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. He also insisted that they must celebrate the sacraments with greater devotion so that they can come nearer to God.

Regarding the relationship with bishop, the Holy Father stressed that the priests must be close to their bishop and the bishop must be close to his priests. Whenever the relationship between priests and bishop is strained, the pastoral effectiveness suffers. He asked the bishops that they should do everything possible to keep up the closeness with their priests. The priests, on their part, must obey and respect their bishops.

The third type of relationship that the Holy Father spoke is closeness among priests. There should be no groups based on ethnicity and there is no room for party politics among the priests. All the priests form a communion with their bishop. The Holy Father pointed out some of the dangers that the celibate priests can fall into – gossiping, constant complaining, finding faults with one another, etc. The priests should not hide from one another. Instead, they must experience unity among them. As one presbyterium, they must meet together as often as possible with the bishop.

Finally, the Holy Father said that the priests must be close to their people. They should not consider themselves superior and feel different from them. After all, they came from the people of God. St Paul writing to Timothy insisted that he should preserve the grace of ordination and obey his elders.

I am sure you will find some time to read the full text of the letter of Pope Francis to the priests and to reflect upon the four-fold relationships that he spoke to the Syro-Malabar bishops as a message for the priests. The annual retreats, monthly priests' conferences and various celebrations are occasions for us to strengthen our communion with one another.

NEWS AND EVENTS

Ad Limina Visit: It was a blessed moment for our Syro-Malabar Church. The visit began on 3 October 2019 with the celebration of Holy Qurbana at the tomb of St Peter. All the 52 bishops participated in the Eucharistic celebration. At 10.30 am on the same day, Pope Francis met all the bishops. The meeting with the Holy Father was informal and friendly. All the bishops were given opportunities to share anything related to our church or ministry. The Holy father replied with great love but with precision. He acknowledged the ministry that is being carried in our Church and he imparted his blessing to all the members of the Church. During the days that followed, the bishops visited various the dicasteries and congregations. They held fruitful discussions on the various issues pertaining to our Church with the respective officials. On 12 October 2019, the Syro-Malabar Procura was inaugurated in the presence of all the bishops. The canonisation of Bl. Mariam Thresiatook place on 13 October 2019. All the Syro-Malabar bishops took part.

Chain Rosary in the Parishes: The month of October is the month of the Holy Rosary. During this month, all the parishes of our Eparchy organised special Holy Qurbana and Rosary services. Pious associations and Uraviyams came forward to commemorate this event in the parishes for a period of ten

days. On 20 October 2019, chain rosary from house to house was organised according to the Uraviyams in the various parishes.

Annual Retreat for Priests: This year annual retreat of priests was held from 20 to 25 October 2019 at Sangamam. Mar Prince Antony Panayankadan, Bishop of Adilabad, was the preacher. The retreat preacher focused on the themes of Evangelisation and Mission. They are relevant topics for us, as ours is a mission Eparchy. Further, the month of October was celebrated as the extraordinary month of mission. All most all the diocesan priests of the Eparchy attended the retreat and experienced renewed enthusiasm for the missionary work. I thank the Fathers who organized the retreat and all of you for participating in it with great devotion.

Silver Jubilee of CMC Convent Pilankarai: Mariam Nivas Convent, Pilankarai run by the CMC Sisters has completed twenty-five years of mission work in Pilankarai. The concluding ceremony was held on 26 October 2019 at Pilankarai. Rev. Fr Thomas Powathuparampil, Protosyncellus, was the main celebrant at the Eucharist and Rev Fr Jose Muttathupadam, former parish priest, was the guest of honour. Many priests and religious were present for this historic event. Mother Viji CMC, Provincial of St Chavara Province, organized the programme along with the superior of the convent. I extend my gratitude for their service in the parish and wish them the God's blessings for the fruitful ministry.

Blessing of Presbytery at Manjalumoodu: The Little Flower Forane Church constructed a beautiful presbytery for the priests and it was blessed on 27 October 2019. It was the result of hard work of parishioners along with the parish priest Rev. Fr Augustine Thalodil. Fr Augustine is working hard to develop the parish both spiritually and materially. The face of Manjalumoodu parish has totally changed. I sincerely thank him and the parishioners for their hard work and dedication. On 27 October 2019 was the 60th birthday of Fr Augustine Thalodil. I wish him God's blessings.

Rosary Rally: Every year under the leadership of Marian Senai, the Eparchy organises Rosary Rally. In order to give maximum participation from all the parishes, this year we decided to organise the Rally by combining two Foranes each: Pilankalai-Soosaipuram, Padanthalumood-Nithravilai and Manjalumoodu-Arukani. It was held on 27 October 2019 in Forane level. The participation of our people has increased and more people were able to participate in the Rosary Rally in their own Foranes. About 1600 people participated in the Rally.

Requiem Holy Qurbana for Mother Maria FCC: The month's mind for Mother Maria FCC was commemorated on 31 October 2019 at Sanjoe Provincial House, Azhahiyamandapam. Mother Maria FCC was one of the prominent and helpful persons of our Eparchy. She loved the Church and our Eparchy. All her activities were mission-oriented. She was also a spiritual person, who respected authority. I was happy to preside over the Requiem Qurbana. Many Fathers concelebrated with me and prayed for the eternal rest of Mother Maria.

INFORMATION

❖ **Pastoral Council Members:** The election for the pastoral council members of the Eparchy was held in the months of September and October. Rev. Fr Jose Muttathupadam was the convener. Rev. Fr Mijo Puthenpurayil and Mr John Vayalinkarai helped him to conduct the elections. The first meeting of the pastoral council will be held on 1 November 2019 at 9.30am at Sangamam. Ex-officio members, all the directors of various Eparchial departments, elected and nominated

members are requested to participate in the first session of sixth Pastoral Council. The parish priests are asked to send your representatives for the pastoral council.

- ❖ **Inauguration of Silver Jubilee of the Eparchy:** Under the leadership of Rev. Fr Thomas Powathuparampil, Vicar General, a committee was formed to make plans and schedules for the preparation for the silver Jubilee of the Eparchy. A number of meetings were held within the presbyterium, the Forane Vicars and the faithful in order to chalk out the various events that should be included in the celebrations. A questionnaire was administered to the faithful in order to collect their opinion on the spiritual, educational, charitable and social ministries in the Eparchy. The presbyterium gathered on 25 October 2019 to study the findings of the people of God. They were very revealing. They can help us to plan better for the spiritual renewal of the Eparchy. The Jubilee committee has prepared the programmes based on the suggestions that the various groups have made. As you know, the 23rd Eparchial Day falls on 11 November 2019 but the Eparchial level celebrations will be held on 10 November 2019. During the Holy Qurbana we shall have the official inauguration of Silver Jubilee celebrations. The celebrations will be held in Padanthalumoodu at 3.00 pm. Kindly encourage as many people as possible to take part in the programme.
- ❖ **Parish level Inauguration of the Silver Jubilee:** To give more participation and to generate involvement of our faithful, it is good to have a symbolic inauguration of the silver Jubilee of our Eparchy at the parish level. I propose 24 November 2019, Solemnity of Christ the King, as a possible date. In my next circular to the faithful on November 3, 2019, I shall give some suggestions regarding the mode of celebrations. I leave it to the discretion of the parish priests to plan and have a meaningful celebration in your respective parishes.
- ❖ **Mission Sunday:** We celebrated the World Mission Sunday on 20 October 2019. I remind you, dear Fathers, to send the Mission Sunday collection to Rev. Fr Johnsilal Arackaparambil, Eparchial Procurator, at the earliest. Kindly make sure that the amount is not lower than the amounts you sent during the previous years. This special Mission Sunday collection will be sent to Rome for the missionary activities around the globe.
- ❖ **Mission League Rally:** This year, we could not conduct the Mission League Rally in the month of October. The rally will be held on 17 November 2019 as part of the Silver Jubilee celebrations of our Eparchy. Dear Fathers, please encourage the Mission League children to take part in the rally and make sure that more children participate from your parishes. Kindly arrange vehicles to transport the children.
- ❖ **Celebration of Canonization of St Mariam Theresia:** As you have already known, St Mariam Theresia, holy Founder of Holy Family Congregation, was canonized on 13 October 2019 by Pope Francis in Rome. The Holy Family Congregation is thanking God for this singular gift. They are celebrating it on 16 November 2019 in Thrissur. Our Eparchial level thanksgiving celebrations will be held on 23 November 2019 at Padanthalumoodu. I request all to participate in this joyful celebration.
- ❖ **Eparchial Bible Convention:** The Eparchy organizes three-day convention at Kalluvilai every year. This year the convention will be on 29, 30 November and 1 December 2019. I welcome you all to attend the convention.
- ❖ Regency Brothers have completed their six months of ministry in October and they were sent to new places for regency on 14 October 2019. The regency places are as follows: Br Sanjoe Mon from Sangamam is shifted to KKSSS, Kalluvilai; Br Lindo from Kalluvilai is shifted to St Mary's Minor Seminary; Br Albin Jose from Manjalumoodu parish is shifted to Sangamam; Br Divin Raj from Bishop's House is shifted to Manjalumoodu parish; Br Amanto from Minor Seminary is shifted to Bishop's House. In the place of Rev. Fr Thomas Sathianesan, Rev. Fr Johnsilal is appointed as the director of regent in the Bishop's House.

- ❖ **Deaconate Ministry:** At the end of November, Deacon Robin and Deacon Toji will be returning to the Eparchy after the completion of their theological studies. They will be doing their deaconate ministry in the parishes that will be assigned to them.

UPCOMING EVENTS

01 November 2019	- Pastoral Council, Sangamam
02 November 2019	- Vestition of FCC Sisters, Azhahiyamandabam
03 November 2019	- Blessing of Kazhuvanhattai Church
10 November 2019	- Diocesan Day Celebration & Silver Jubilee Inauguration
11 November 2019	- Diocesan Day
14 November 2019	- Interdepartmental Meeting
17 November 2019	- Mission League Rally
20 November 2019	- Priests' Conference, Sangamam
23 November 2019	- Celebration for the Canonization of St Mariam Thresia
24 November 2019	- Diocesan Silver Jubilee Inauguration in the Parishes
26 November 2019	- Inter-Eparchial Meeting
29 Nov – 1 December 2019	- Diocesan Convention, Kalluvilai

CONCLUSION

The month of October is coming to an end. I am sure you have fruitfully spent this month dedicated to the Holy Rosary by praying the Rosary and by meditating on the great mysteries of our salvation. All these will help us to come closer to Jesus, her Son. It was also the extra-ordinary month of the mission. It was an opportunity for reflection, prayer and support for the missionary efforts of individuals, communities and whole Church. With the celebration of the 23rd Diocesan Day drawing near, let us now redouble our efforts at building up the kingdom of God with greater commitment and fervour.

With my prayers and blessings,

Yours in Christ Jesus,



+ **George Rajendran SDB**
Bishop of Thuckalay

